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CHAPTER 17

# HELLENISTIC JEWISH LITERATURE

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## 1. Introduction

The name "Hellenistic" is given by students of classical civilization to the period of about three centuries following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the Near East. The Greek noun *hellenistes* commonly meant a non-Greek speaker of Greek or imitator of Greek fashion; "Hellenistic" is therefore an appropriate term for an age in which Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, Iranians and other Oriental peoples were united—so far, at least, as their wealthier urban classes were concerned—in a common pattern of Greek-Oriental culture with more or less important variations of local color.

Students of European history usually consider the lower limit of the Hellenistic period to be 30 B.C.E. because by that time the Roman Empire under Augustus had consolidated its control over the Greek-Oriental kingdoms of Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor. But the orientalist and the historian of Western culture are inclined to extend the lower limit another few centuries because the official and educated classes in the large cities of the Near East continued to be Greek rather than Roman in speech and culture long after the Hellenistic kingdoms had been incorporated as provinces of the Roman Empire. In the case of the Jews this is true even of the Diaspora communities in Italy and other parts of Europe.

While each age has, of course, its peculiar significance in the perspective of world history even for those who assume that historical development is continuous in most spheres of social activity, that significance may seem to later ages to be clearer in one form of culture than in others. Thus, the Hellenistic age is especially interesting to us because it saw the birth and early nurturing of a world-consciousness in philosophy, law, religion and politics. This cosmopolitanism, to use a term coined by the Stoic philosophers or possibly by the Jewish philosopher Philo under Stoic influence, was only partially realized in such forms as Jewish-Christian ethics, Roman law, Greek ethnography, pagan astrology and Gnosticism; but these forms of universalism or cosmopolitanism were sufficiently developed in the Hellenistic age to provide thought and impulse to action for many centuries afterwards.

## 2. THE SEPTUAGINT

While the scribes of the Second Commonwealth were collecting and ordering the sacred books, many Jews both in Palestine and in the Diaspora were circulating didactic or historical or apocalyptic writings, some of them under the names of patriarchs or prophets, in order to obtain greater authority for their works. These books, even those written in Hebrew or Aramaic, were not admitted into the canon of Sacred Scripture by the Rabbinic scholars of the early talmudic period for one of two reasons: either the rabbis thought that they had been written after the close of the Persian period, when prophetic inspiration was supposed to have ceased, or else they regarded them as unorthodox in content. In a few cases, however, such postprophetic books were admitted into the canon; for example, the Book of Daniel, which represents itself as a work of the Babylonian period, and perhaps the Book of Ecclesiastes, ascribed to Solomon.

But the noncanonical Hebrew and Aramaic writings were translated into Greek and circulated among the Jews of the Diaspora. Some of these writings in their Greek version were included in manuscripts of the Greek Bible, and were preserved either as sacred or as edifying books by the Christian church. In a few cases the original Hebrew or Aramaic text, or one based on the original, has been preserved by Jewish scribes, for example, the Wisdom of Ben Sira and the Book of Tobit. But in the case of most of these so-called apocryphal or pseudepigraphic books, we have only the Greek version, handed down by Christian scribes.

Although this chapter does not discuss the apocryphal writings composed by Palestinian Jews in Hebrew or Aramaic, they have been mentioned because of their being preserved in Greek and included in manuscripts of the Greek Bible. We must now turn our attention to this translation, which is extremely important and interesting in its own right.[1a]

This great monument of Hellenistic Jewish literature is called the Septuagint, meaning "seventy" in Latin, because there was current among early Christian scholars of Western Europe the story, first told by a Hellenistic Jewish writer (see below on the Letter of Aristeas), that seventy-two elders were sent from Palestine to Alexandria in Egypt to translate the Law of Moses from Hebrew into Greek. In the course of time the title "Translation of the Seventy-two" was simplified into "the Seventy" and was extended to include the translation of the prophetic and hagiographic portions of the Hebrew Bible.

The Septuagint is of great importance for several reasons. In the first place, it is a valuable control of the traditional Hebrew text of the Bible, known as the Masora. The earliest complete Hebrew manuscript of the Bible dates from the tenth century C.E., whereas the principal manuscripts

of the Greek Bible date from the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. (There are considerable papyrus fragments written still earlier but they agree very closely with the chief manuscript, *Codex Vaticanus*.) Moreover, the Greek translations of the various books of Scripture were made from unvocalized Hebrew texts. Thus they sometimes yield a reading of a form or the meaning of a root which makes better sense than that of the masoretic text.

In the second place, this early translation, having been made by competent scholars with some knowledge of early Palestinian exegesis, is of great aid in interpreting some obscure passages in the Hebrew. There is also a strong probability that in some passages the Hebrew text was altered by the Palestinian scholars for theological or legalistic reasons, and since the Greek version was made from an earlier text than that handed down to us by the Palestinian authorities, it sometimes enables us to recover the original meaning of the biblical passage.

In the third place, the Septuagint was the source of a number of secondary versions made for the early Christian churches in Europe and the Near East such as the Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Slavonic, Gothic and Old Latin. (The Old Latin has not been entirely replaced by Jerome's translation, called the Vulgate, which became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church by decree of the Council of Trent in 1546.) Thus through the Septuagint the contents of the Hebrew Bible became known to the peoples of Europe and Western Asia and contributed greatly to the forming of their beliefs and institutions.

In the fourth place, the Greek Bible played a considerable part in the gradual transformation of Greek philosophy into the theology of the Church Fathers and into the influential body of thought known as Neoplatonism. These in turn exerted an immeasurably great influence on medieval Scholasticism, Christian, Jewish and Moslem. For example, it would be difficult to overrate the importance for following centuries of the synthesis effected between the Platonic theory of the creation of the world by a beneficent spirit, the Demiurge, as described in the *Timaeus*, and the account of the creation given in the first two chapters of the Greek Genesis. Such syntheses are presented by the Jewish philosopher Philo and by the Christian philosopher Chalcidius in his Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*.

As we shall deal with Philo below, it may suffice to remark here that his great work of harmonizing Greek philosophy with Judaism, which deeply influenced Christian theologians, perhaps all the way down to Dante, would have been almost impossible if he had not had at his disposal an official Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, which he regarded as no less inspired than the original text.

The most important fact about the Septuagint for those who are interested in the history of European civilization, as well as in Judaism, is

that the existence of this version was indispensable to the rise of Christianity. The earliest Christian apostles to the Gentiles would probably have had much less success in converting Jews of the Diaspora and "God-fearing" Gentiles to Christianity if they had not had an authoritative Greek text of the Jewish Scriptures with which to support their claim that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they called the Lord Christ, was the Messiah whose coming had been predicted by the Hebrew prophets. The quotations from the Old Testament found in the writings of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers agree closely with the text of the Septuagint, although in some cases, of course, the Christian writers quote from memory or alter the wording to suit their apologetic purposes.

For the several reasons given above we may fairly say that the Greek translation of the Bible by the Jewish scholars of Alexandria was one of the most important translations ever made.

Before turning to the original Hellenistic Jewish writings, let us briefly consider some of the stylistic aspects of the Septuagint. Its vocabulary and inflections were not very different from those of contemporary pagan writings composed in the language used by the vast majority of people in the Hellenistic period, the so-called "common" Greek dialect or *Koiné*. But because the Septuagint was a translation from Hebrew and dealt with concepts and ways of living and speaking peculiar to Jewish Palestine, its Hebraic style and special usages of many terms must have made it seem a strange and un-Greek book to such Gentiles as may have chanced to read it or hear it quoted. Many Hebrew idioms, to be sure, were adapted to Greek usage, but most of them were taken over literally, with curious results to the Greek style. The various books of the Bible differ in this respect. Some of the narratives in the Greek versions of Samuel and Kings, for example, read fairly smoothly, while the Greek Book of Ecclesiastes is so literal as to be almost unintelligible to one ignorant of the Hebrew original.

On the whole, the Greek Bible is a poor specimen of literary Greek, not because of the linguistic incompetence of the translators but because their primary concern was to produce a faithful rendering of the Hebrew for Greek-speaking Jews. There are occasional surface Hellenizations, such as allusions to well-known mythological figures and the use of Greek metrical forms in parts of the Book of Proverbs. But beneath these superficial adaptations there is a thoroughly Jewish, even Hebraic, spirit in the Septuagint. Those Jews in the Diaspora whose reading was confined to the Greek Bible were in no danger of being seduced by the charm of Greek literature.

## 3. HISTORICAL LITERATURE

When we turn to the historical literature of the Jews originally written in Greek, we must not expect to find anything like the relatively scientific spirit of inquiry and concern for factual accuracy that we admire in such Greek historians as Thucydides and Polybius. Rather we shall find that most of the historical writing preserved to us is heavily weighted with self-conscious pride in Jewish cultural achievements and might more justly be called apologetic or hortatory than historical. Some of it is merely historical fiction.

### 1. *Demetrius, Eupolemus and Artapanus*

Let us begin by briefly discussing three (probably) Alexandrian writers of whose works we have only fragments preserved in the ninth book of the Evangelical Preparation of the Church Father Eusebius, written about 300 C.E. Eusebius took these excerpts from a *Universal History* compiled by Alexander Polyhistor, a Greek encyclopedist of the first century B.C.E.

Some time near the end of the third century B.C.E. a Jew named Demetrius wrote a history of Israel in brief chronological form. The extant fragments deal with some of the events in the lives of Jacob and Moses and with the number of years that elapsed between the Israelite deportation to Assyria and the writer's own date, the reign of Ptolemy IV. Although Josephus held Demetrius to be a Gentile, the author's painstaking attempt to fix the exact dates of Jewish history makes it more likely that he was a Jew. Neither the style nor the content of the remaining fragments is of exceptional interest.

More promising are the fragments of Eupolemus, who wrote a *History of the Jews* about the middle of the second century B.C.E. Whether he lived in Egypt or Palestine is not known. Some scholars identify him with the Eupolemus mentioned in I Macc. 8:17 as an envoy sent to Rome by Judas Maccabeus; they do so partly on the ground that Eupolemus the historian seems to have used a Hebrew as well as a Greek text of Scripture. But there is no reason why an Alexandrian Jew should not have known Hebrew in addition to Greek. On the whole, it is more probable that Eupolemus wrote in Egypt than in Palestine.

Like most of the Hellenistic Jewish historians known to us Eupolemus embellished his work with legendary material showing the Jews in the most favorable light. He tells us, among other things, that Moses was the first Sage and the first to introduce writing among the Jews; the Phoenicians took it from the Jews and the Greeks took it from the Phoenicians. The most extensive fragment preserved by Eusebius tells of the building of Solomon's Temple and includes the imaginary correspondence between

Solomon and Vaphres (biblical Hophra). We may cite from this the reply made by the Egyptian king to Solomon's request for assistance, which was obviously designed to impress Gentile readers with the greatness of the Hebrew king.

King Vaphres to the great king, Solomon, greeting. I have read your letter with great pleasure, and I and all my court regard as memorable the day of your accession to the throne, for you are a worthy man and one favored by a very great god. In accordance with your request I have sent you eighty thousand men from the following districts, etc.

Eupolemus, as we can see from this brief excerpt, was not an impartial historian of the Jews. But his partiality was moderate in comparison with that of his near-contemporary Artapanus.

On internal evidence it is clear that Artapanus wrote in Alexandria, but when he lived is more difficult to determine further than that he was active before the first century B.C.E., since he was known to Alexander Polyhistor, who flourished about 100 B.C.E.

Artapanus bettered the example of rationalistic Greek historians who taught that the popular gods were only deified men who had made useful discoveries in art and science. He went so far as to assert that Moses was none other than the Greek Museus and the Egyptian Hermes (Thoth). Not only were the Jews a distinguished people of Syrian origin, and not the descendants of plague-carrying outcasts from Egypt, as their enemies charged, but Moses had even given the Egyptians the elements of their culture. It seems strange to us that a Jewish writer should have attributed the origin of Egyptian idolatry to Moses, but perhaps, as some scholars have suggested, Artapanus meant to pass off his work as that of an Egyptian priest (some of whom, like Artapanus himself, bore Persian names after the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses). It is probable that Josephus in his narrative of Moses in the *Antiquities* used the writings of Artapanus, thinking him to be a pagan author.

A translation of part of the longest extant fragment of Artapanus may serve to show his inventive powers.

After the death of Abraham [a slip for "Jacob"] and his son and also Mempsasthenoth, the king of Egypt, the latter's son Palmenoth succeeded to the throne, but he proved to be unfriendly to the Jews. He first built Kessan and erected a temple there, and then built a temple in Heliopolis. He had a daughter named Merris, whom he married to a certain Khenephres, king of the region above Memphis; at that time there were several kings in Egypt. Merris, being childless, secretly adopted a Hebrew child whom she called Moses. By the Greeks he was called Museus. This Moses was the teacher of Orpheus. When he reached manhood he devised many things useful to mankind; he invented boats and stone-laying machines and Egyptian weapons and instruments for irrigation and war. He was also the founder of philosophy.

Moreover, he divided the country into thirty-six nomes, and to each of these he assigned the worship of a particular god. To the priests he gave the sacred writing [hieroglyphs]. Now these gods were cats and dogs and ibises. He also assigned to the priests separate estates. All these things he did in order to make Khenephres's rule more secure, for before that time the unruly populace had expelled some of their kings and installed others in their places or reinstalled the dethroned ones. Because of all these achievements Moses was loved by the common people and was granted divine honors by the priests under the name of Hermes ["interpreter"] because he had interpreted the sacred writings.

2. *II Maccabees*

The Second Book of Maccabees is no mere variant of the First Book of Maccabees even though their contents are in part the same. The differences between them are more interesting and significant than the similarities. I Maccabees was originally written in Hebrew; II Maccabees is a Greek epitome of an original Greek work in five books composed by an otherwise unknown Jason of Cyrene (in North Africa). I Maccabees covers a period of forty years, 175-135 B.C.E., from the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes to the death of Simon and the winning of Judea's political independence; II Maccabees covers a period of only fifteen years, 175-161 B.C.E., from the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (or a little earlier) to the victory of Judas Maccabeus over Nicanor. I Maccabees is a rather matter-of-fact account of the military achievements of the Hasmonean family; II Maccabees is a partly legendary account of the Jewish heroes and martyrs whose noble deeds were achieved with the miraculous help of God. It is largely because of the exalted tone and picturesque marvels of II Maccabees that it has won a more favored place in biblical literature than the more sober and historical I Maccabees. The heroic loyalty to ancestral tradition of the old man Eleazar and the mother with seven sons, in spite of the tortures inflicted on them by the Syrian king, became a classical example of martyrdom that was imitated in the vast literature of persecution of both Jews and Christians.

To the historian of Judaism and Christianity the book is especially important because in addition to various statements about the observance of the Sabbath and other practices that may be said to reveal a Pharisaic point of view, it contains what are probably the earliest explicit references to the resurrection of the body. This particular belief became one of the few cardinal dogmas of Pharisaism. It is stated in several passages of the book. In 7:9 one of the martyred youths says to the king before dying under torture:

You braggart, you release us from this present life, but the King of the world will resurrect us to an eternal new life because we have died for His laws.

Again in 12:43-44 we are told that Judas made a sin-offering in Jerusalem because of his belief in resurrection.

> For if he had not expected that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead.

Incidentally, this last passage is one of several which have made II Maccabees one of the biblical writings most esteemed by Roman Catholic theologians.

As a characteristic example of the author's (or perhaps epitomator's) love of the marvelous and his rhetorical inventions we may select the following passage, 3:24-28, concerning the Divine punishment visited on the Syrian official Heliodorus for attempting to rob the treasury of the Temple in Jerusalem.

> But no sooner had he and his guards arrived before the treasury than the Lord of our fathers and Master of all authority gave a great manifestation, so that all those who had come with him in their recklessness were smitten by the power of God and paralyzed and routed in terror. For there appeared to them a horse bearing a terrible rider and adorned with most handsome trappings, which rushed swiftly on Heliodorus and struck him with its forefeet. And its rider appeared in golden armor. And two youths also appeared to him, remarkably strong and most handsome in form and splendid in dress. These stood on either side of him and flogged him continually, showering many blows upon him. Suddenly he fell to the ground and was overwhelmed by great darkness, and so his men seized him and placed him on a litter—the same man indeed who had just entered the treasury we mentioned before, with such pomp and so great a retinue they now carried off because he was unable to help himself. Thus did they clearly recognize the sovereign power of God.

The author's ability to use simpler but more effective rhetoric is illustrated by his account of the death of the aged martyr Eleazar, 6:30-31:

> As he was about to die under the blows, he said with a groan, "The Lord with His holy knowledge knows that though I might have escaped death, I endure dreadful pains in my body, being flogged, but in my soul I am glad to suffer this through fear of Him." And so he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of virtue not only to the young but also to the greatest part of his nation.

### 3. *III Maccabees*

The Third Book of Maccabees is found in most manuscripts of the Septuagint and in the Greek editions of the Apocrypha but it is not included in the Vulgate version or in the King James version, and is therefore less known to English readers than are I and II Maccabees. The word "Maccabees" in its title is misleading since the book is concerned with the Jews of Egypt and has nothing to do with the Hasmoneans; still

there is a certain appropriateness in connecting this book with the two books of the Maccabees since it bears an obvious resemblance to II Maccabees in conception and style and also to some extent in the incidents related.

III Maccabees supposedly dates from the reign of the Macedonian king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopator, 221-203 B.C.E. It relates that Ptolemy, after defeating the Seleucid king Antiochus III at Raphia on the Egyptian-Palestine border in 217 B.C.E., attempted to enter the Temple of Jerusalem and was miraculously kept therefrom (like Heliodorus in II Maccabees). On his return to Egypt the wrathful king decreed that his Jewish subjects were to suffer the loss of some of their religious and political privileges unless they should register as worshipers of the Ptolemies' patron god Dionysius. On seeing that the vast majority of Jews remained loyal to their religion, he had Jews brought from the country to Alexandria and imprisoned in the Hippodrome to be trampled to death by intoxicated elephants. Through Divine intervention the elephants turned against the persecutors of the Jews, and King Ptolemy, being convinced that the Jews enjoyed Divine protection, repented of his hostility and allowed them to return home safely and to take vengeance, not on Greek or Egyptian persecutors, be it noted, but on Jewish apostates. The story and atmosphere of the book remind one strongly of II Maccabees, the Letter of Aristeas and the Book of Esther.

When the book was actually written and to what incident in Jewish history it refers is difficult to determine. The incident of the exposure to trampling by drunken elephants is practically the same as that described by Josephus in his *Against Apion* as having taken place in the reign of Ptolemy VII Physcon, almost a century after the time of Ptolemy IV Philopator; moreover, the political troubles of the Jews hinted at in the book seem to belong to the time of Ptolemy Physcon rather than to that of Ptolemy Philopator. On the other hand, the description of the battle of Raphia and other details of the official acts of Ptolemy Philopator indicate that the author had a good knowledge of the events of his reign. The various problems of date and composition are best solved by assuming that an Egyptian Jewish writer of the first century B.C.E. has combined events of the reigns of two different kings and has added picturesque details suggested by the Book of Esther and II Maccabees to make up a well-knit piece of historical fiction. Several scholars have argued that III Maccabees was written in the Roman period and really alludes to the persecution of the Jews in Alexandria (and Palestine) by the Roman emperor Caligula, but, for reasons which cannot be given here, the present writer believes that the book was written in the first century B.C.E. to encourage the Jews of Palestine and Egypt to hope for Divine intervention in the face of an invasion of Palestine by the Ptolemaic sovereigns Cleopatra and Ptolemy VIII Lathyrus during the reign of Alexander Janneus.

The book is written in quite respectable and sometimes rather polished

Greek. As a story it is continuously interesting and even exciting, Not the least skillful device of the author is the succession of pointed references to God's power to save the Jews from their enemies. As a whole the work has less of the miraculous than II Maccabees but is no less orthodox in doctrine. The following brief passage illustrates its style and theology:

6:16-21. And just as Eleazar was ending his prayer, the king came to the Hippodrome with the beasts and his whole insolent force. And when the Jews beheld this, they cried out to heaven so that the adjacent hollows re-echoed their cry and caused an uncontrollable wailing among all the host. Then the greatly glorious, almighty and true God manifested His holy countenance and opened the gates of heaven, from which two glorious angels of terrible aspect descended, being visible to all except the Jews. And these stood over against them and filled the army of their adversaries with confusion and fear and bound them with immovable fetters. And a trembling fell upon the king's body, and forgetfulness of his heavy-handed arrogance came upon him. And the beasts turned round against the forces that followed them and began trampling on them and destroying them.

4. *Josephus*

The late Henry St. John Thackeray began his discussion of Josephus in his admirable Stroock Lectures on the historian by reminding his audience that there was a time in his country (England) when almost every house possessed two books, a Bible and a Josephus in the old eighteenth-century version of William Whiston. The same thing might be said of Presbyterian Scotland and Puritan New England and of other Protestant countries of Europe with their various vernacular translations of Josephus. But translations and paraphrases of Josephus were popular long before Whiston's English translation was made. Great numbers of Jews from the early Middle Ages down to recent times have eagerly read the Hebrew *Yosippon*, which is to a large extent a paraphrase of Josephus's *Jewish War*, while the Latin paraphrase ascribed to Hegesippus found great favor among Christian Latinists. Few pagan historians of classical antiquity have been more widely read or quoted than Flavius Josephus, the Palestinian Jew, whose Greek works on the history of his people and their war with Rome and eloquent apology for Judaism have done much to atone for his adherence to the Roman cause when his country was conquered by Vespasian and Titus.

Joseph, son of Matthias, later called Flavius Josephus, claims, in his *Life*, to have been of priestly and Hasmonean descent. He was born in 37 or 38 C.E. in the year when Caligula became emperor. He tells us that he was so precocious a student of the Jewish law that learned Rabbis consulted him when he was only fourteen. He studied the doctrines of the various Jewish schools and even retired to the wilderness for three years of ascetic training with a certain Bannus.

At the age of nineteen Josephus became a member of the Pharisaic party. In 64 C.E. he sailed to Rome and succeeded, with the help of a Jewish actor and the Empress Poppea, in liberating some priests who had been sent to Nero for trial. Josephus's visit to Rome impressed him with the hopelessness of a Jewish revolt against Rome which the extremists were planning. However, during the interval between the defeat of the Twelfth Legion under Cestius in the autumn of 66 and Vespasian's arrival in Palestine in the spring of 67 Josephus became an important figure in the revolt.

What his private attitude was toward the Romans and the exact nature of the commission entrusted to him by the authorities in Jerusalem are matters of doubt. In his earliest work, the *Jewish War*, Josephus states that the responsible leaders appointed him commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee.[2a] In the *Life*, written some thirty years later, he writes that he and two other priests were chosen to induce the rebels in Galilee to lay down their arms and to leave the decision of war to the authorities in Jerusalem; only afterwards was he made supreme commander of the forces in Galilee. Those scholars are probably right who prefer the later account and hold that in the *Jewish War* Josephus has exaggerated the importance of his appointment in order to impress Roman readers. At any rate, it appears from both works that he fought without conviction though he may have shown resourcefulness and military skill.

After the fall of the town of Jotapata, which had held out against the Romans for more than a month, Josephus with a few companions escaped to a cave, and persuaded them not to kill him to prevent his capture or surrender but to draw lots to determine the order of their mutual self-destruction. "He, however—" the evasive writer tells us, "should one say by fortune or by the providence of God?—was left alone with one other, and anxious neither to be condemned by lot nor, should he be left to the last, to stain his hand with his countryman's blood, he persuaded this man also under a pledge to remain alive." Brought before Vespasian, Josephus predicted that the Roman general would become emperor (as the Roman historian Suetonius also attests) and thanks to this prediction was liberated from bonds when Vespasian was acclaimed emperor by his troops in July, 69 C.E. During the last two years of the war Josephus served as interpreter and mediator. At the end of the war he was given a piece of land outside Jerusalem and some sacred books; he also obtained the liberation of several of his friends.

The last thirty years or so of his life the Jewish careerist spent in Rome, enjoying for about a third of this time the patronage of the imperial family. But life was not wholly pleasant for him during his residence in Rome, for he was constantly subject to the criticism of his coreligionists as a deserter or as a falsifier of his part in the war. Whatever the justice

of these charges, we must be sincerely grateful to Josephus for having left us the four works which have so greatly enriched our knowledge of Jewish and Greco-Roman history.

The earliest extant work, the *Jewish War* or *Capture* (of Jerusalem) as Josephus himself probably meant it to be called, was clearly written soon after 70 C.E. at the suggestion of the Roman government in order to discourage further opposition by the Jews and other peoples living in Parthian territory. Our Greek text is apparently a second edition of the book, the first presumably being closer to the original draft, now lost, written in Aramaic. Parenthetically I may say that it is a very doubtful assumption that the Slavonic version is a translation of the original Aramaic text rather than a secondary translation of the Greek. Various references to Christianity or Jewish prophecies of the Roman period, which are found in the Slavonic version, are probably additions made by Byzantine scribes.

The *Jewish War* has a rapid survey of Jewish history in the Hellenistic-Roman period in the first book, largely based on the *Life of Herod* by Nicholas of Damascus, and in the remaining six books dramatically narrates the course of the Jewish war against Rome and its aftermath. Josephus not only drew on his personal experience but also used the military journals of the Roman commanders Titus and Vespasian and other official Roman documents. For these reasons the work has the greatest value as a historical source. At the same time, like most ancient histories, it contains a number of rhetorical embellishments, especially in the speeches attributed to the leading actors, and various echoes of Greek writers, notably the tragic poet Sophocles. Also it naturally reflects the prejudices and private interests of Josephus himself. With the help of a well-trained Greek collaborator the Jewish historian was able to produce a work of considerable literary skill both in construction and in style. We may safely conjecture that educated Romans found considerable pleasure in reading it.

Of even greater interest to students of Judaism and Christianity is Josephus's second great work, the *Jewish Antiquities*, divided into twenty books like its partial prototype, the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The *Jewish Antiquities*, written during the reign of Domitian after Josephus had lost his royal patrons, was put out with a different motive from that which prompted him to publish the *Jewish War*. The later work was designed not to celebrate the achievements of the Romans but to acquaint them with the history of the conquered Jewish people and to show that the Jews had a glorious past worthy of the respect of their Roman conquerors.

The first ten books of the *Jewish Antiquities*, covering the history of the Jews from the patriarchal period to the Babylonian Exile are in the main a paraphrase of the Greek version of the biblical narratives from Genesis

to Daniel. Josephus's paraphrase of the Septuagint is no mere stylistic variation of the biblical text. He has incorporated numerous legendary and homiletic additions, most of them from Alexandrian writers (including Philo) and Palestinian tradition. Recent studies have shown that in addition to the Greek Bible Josephus used the Hebrew original and an Aramaic version closely resembling the extant Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan. The *Jewish Antiquities* is, of course, a valuable check on the Septuagint text, but more than that, it is of great importance as one of the earliest specimens of Jewish biblical exegesis.

The second half of the *Jewish Antiquities* covers the period from the return of the exiles to Judea in the reign of Cyrus to the term of the last procurator before the outbreak of the war against Rome. For the history of the Persian period and the Hellenistic period down to the reign of Hyrcanus, Josephus has used as his chief sources the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Esther, the Letter of Aristeas and I Maccabees, supplemented by handbooks of Greek history written by Gentile historians. For the Hasmonean, Herodian and procuratorial periods he is chiefly dependent on Jewish tradition and on the works of the Greek historians Nicholas of Damascus and Strabo and some unknown Roman historians. His quotations and paraphrases of Nicholas and Strabo make up a considerable part of the fragments preserved of their lost works.

The *Jewish Antiquities* is not only our chief and in part our only source for the history of the Jews in Palestine and in the Diaspora during the Hellenistic and Roman periods but it is also a valuable source for some otherwise poorly documented episodes of Seleucid and Roman history; for example, it gives us the most detailed account we possess of the assassination of the Emperor Caligula and the accession of Claudius. Where the *Jewish War* and the *Jewish Antiquities* overlap, as in the reign of Herod the Great, a comparison of the two accounts reveals significant differences of arrangement and political attitude, and thus throws light on Josephus's methods and motives. Not the least interesting portions of the parallel passages in the *Jewish War* and the *Jewish Antiquities* are those dealing with the Jewish schools or parties, Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.[3a] Although Josephus, following the example of Nicholas of Damascus, who wrote for Gentile readers, has converted social and theological differences among the Jewish parties into matters of philosophy, his discussion of their doctrines and controversies must be recognized as one of our principal sources for the history of Judaism in the early talmudic period.

There is another reason why the *Jewish Antiquities* was studied and prized by Christian scholars after the time of Eusebius; in Book XVIII there occurs a brief passage about the life and death of Jesus, the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*, which is the only extant explicit mention of the

founder of Christianity, outside the New Testament of course, dating from the first century of the Common Era. A vast literature exists dealing with the problem of the genuineness of this passage. Almost no modern scholar regards the testimony to Jesus's miraculous powers and resurrection as genuine in its present form; a few scholars believe that it is a Christian revision of an original reference to Jesus that was quite neutral in tone; most scholars believe, with greater justice, that the entire passage is a Christian interpolation.

We have already mentioned the *Life*, published as an appendix to the second edition of the *Jewish Antiquities*. It was probably written to answer the criticisms of the *Jewish War* made by a rival Jewish historian, Justus of Tiberias. Besides being valuable as an account of Josephus's activities as commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee (see above), it provides us with our only though sketchy account of Josephus's entire career.

The latest work of Josephus, *Against Apion*, in two books, has a greater scope than the title indicates, since Apion was only one of several Greek writers whose calumnies against the Jews Josephus undertakes to refute. This little treatise is not only a persuasive and eloquent refutation of the various charges, some of them patently absurd, some more insidious, which were brought against the Jews by Egyptian and Greek anti-Semites and sometimes by more impartial Gentile historians, but it is also an inspired defense of the Mosaic Law and a triumphant vindication of Jewish morality and culture. Few champions of Judaism have more successfully presented their case; and so, this earliest reply to literary anti-Semitism must be regarded as ample atonement for any sins Josephus may have committed against his people as a military leader.

There are far too many quotable passages in Josephus's four works to make it easy to choose any single one in this brief sketch, but I cannot resist quoting part of the conclusion of the *Against Apion* in Thackeray's translation:

> I would therefore boldly maintain that we have introduced to the rest of the world a very large number of very beautiful ideas. What greater beauty than inviolable piety? What higher justice than obedience to the laws? What more beneficial than to be in harmony with one another, to be a prey neither to disunion in adversity nor to arrogance and faction in prosperity; in war to despise death, in peace to devote oneself to crafts or agriculture, and to be convinced that everything in the whole universe is under the eye and direction of God? Had these precepts been either committed to writing or more consistently observed by others before us, we should have owed them a debt of gratitude as their disciples. If, however, it is seen that no one observes them better than ourselves, and if we have shown that we were the first to discover them, then the Apions and Molons and all who delight in lies and abuse may be left to their own confusion.

## 4. JEWISH PROPAGANDA IN GENTILE GUISE

The basic instincts and broad patterns of social behavior were not very different, whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the Hellenistic age from those of present-day peoples, but some of their conventions were dissimilar enough from our own to evoke surprise in a modern person when first he learns of them. The ancient attitude toward plagiarism and literary borrowing, for example, was much less proprietary than it is today. The same is true of their attitude toward the practice of foisting one's own work on the great names of classical tradition. Bearing this in mind, we should not be too greatly scandalized by the fact that some Jewish apologists composed works in prose or verse designed to show Jews in a favorable light, and published them as the writings of real or imaginary Gentile authors, just as Christian writers of the fourth or fifth century forged a correspondence between the Roman philosopher Seneca and the Apostle Paul. The present section deals with the best known works or fragments of this kind which have come down to us. In all probability they are only a small part of the entire body of this literature.

### 1. *Pseudo-Hecateus*

Among the Gentile historians of the time of Alexander the Great and his immediate successors whose works have been preserved only in excerpts by later writers of antiquity was a certain Hecateus who wrote, among other things, a *History of Egypt* including passages on the Jews. Some portions of this book have been preserved by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, who flourished under Augustus. There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of these passages. But there are other passages cited by Josephus and early Christian writers, supposedly from Hecateus's book *On the Jews* or *On Abraham*, which are generally regarded as extracts from a Jewish work passed off as Hecateus's and therefore known today as excerpts from Pseudo-Hecateus. Recently, however, some scholars have convincingly argued that the suspected passages in Josephus's *Against Apion* are really from the genuine Hecateus, and it is likely that as our knowledge increases through the discovery of new evidence, the extent of the assumed pseudepigraphic material will have to be considerably reduced. But the strong probability remains that other fragments from "Hecateus," for example, in Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, are from Pseudo-Hecateus, the Jewish apologist, whose real name and date are unknown to us. That even in antiquity there was some suspicion of the supposititious character of passages quoted from Hecateus's book *On the Jews* is indicated by a statement in Origen that

the author is so attached to this nation because of its wisdom that Herennius Philo [a Hellenized Phoenician, who flourished about 100 C.E.] in his work *On the Jews* in the first place expresses doubt whether the work is by the historian, and in the second place says, if it really is his work, that he has been ravished by Jewish persuasiveness and won over by their doctrines. .

It is perhaps Pseudo-Hecateus, not the genuine Hecateus, who is quoted in the Letter of Aristeas (§5) as saying that pagan writers have refrained from discussing Jewish history because of the great sacredness attaching to it.

2. *The Letter of Aristeas*

Although the Letter of Aristeas was highly esteemed and used by such early Jewish writers as Philo and Josephus (and, of course, by Christian theologians), it was not until the sixteenth century that the liberal Italian Jewish scholar Azariah de Rossi rescued it from the neglect into which, because it was written in Greek, it had fallen among his coreligionists. De Rossi's Hebrew translation and discussion of the Letter of Aristeas are included in his critical history of Jewish tradition, called *Meor Eynayim.*

The Letter of Aristeas purports to be a letter written to a certain Philocrates by his brother, a court official of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.E.). It narrates the events leading up to the translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek made by the Palestinian scholars whom the king invited to Alexandria at the suggestion of the royal librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum. The account of the translators' methods takes up only the last twelfth of the book; the preceding sections describe the emancipation of Jewish captives in Egypt by royal command, the invitation to Eleazar, the High Priest in Jerusalem, to send scholars to Alexandria for the work of translation, the presents sent to the Temple in Jerusalem by Ptolemy, the impressions made on Aristeas by the Temple and the city, and the splendid reception given to the Palestinian scholars on their arrival in Alexandria; then comes a long philosophical discussion, in the form of question and answer, between the king and the Jewish Sages on matters of politics and morality.

Even a casual reading of this fascinating book reveals that the author was not, as he pretends, a Ptolemaic official narrating a series of historical events but a Hellenistic Jew writing a sort of historical novel (or novelette) about the translation of the Law and embellishing it with apologetic passages skillfully employing the devices of Greek philosophical literature.

The problem of the date has long exercised the ingenuity of scholars but the weight of learned opinion today favors a date not long after 200 B.C.E. Such a date would account for some slight errors about the history and court etiquette of Ptolemy II's reign made by the generally well-informed author as well as for his use of certain forms and phrases known

to be current in Egypt in the early part of the second century B.C.E. It may be conjectured, though it would be difficult to prove, that in addition to giving a laudatory description of Jewish customs for the edification of Gentiles, the author had the more specific purpose of alleviating any suspicions entertained by the Ptolemaic ruler of his time that the friendly relations between the Jewish communities of Alexandria and Jerusalem might trouble the political situation in Egypt.

To the Jewish and Christian historians of antiquity the most important part of the Letter of Aristeas was that which told how the Law was translated into Greek. Josephus was content to paraphrase this account but other ancient writers, like the Christian Fathers, Ireneus, Clement and Epiphanius, repeat the picturesque invention of Pseudo-Justin that the seventy-two translators mentioned by Aristeas were placed in thirty-six cells and by Divine inspiration separately produced versions that were found to be in absolute agreement. The original account (§§301-309) reads in part as follows.

> Three days later Demetrius [the royal librarian] took the men and passing along the sea wall of seven stadia to the island, crossed the bridge and went to the northern part. Here he called them together in session in a house built on the seashore; it was very splendid and located in a quiet place. He then encouraged them to carry out the work of translation, for everything had been well provided that was needed for this purpose. So they began their task, making their results agree by comparing them, and what was agreed upon was duly written down with the approval of Demetrius. The session lasted until the ninth hour [3:00 P.M.] After this they were dismissed to attend to their bodily needs, and everything they wanted was freely supplied to them. In addition they were given the same daily provisions as the king; Demetrius attended to this, having been ordered by the king so to do. Early every day they appeared at court and paid their respects to the king, after which they went back to their own place. And, as is the custom among the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea in order to pray to God and then began to read and translate the passages given to each. . . . And it so happened that the work of translation was completed in seventy-two days, as though this had been arranged of set purpose. When the work had been completed, Demetrius called the Jewish populace to the place where the translation had been made, and read it to all in the presence of the translators, who received a great ovation from the populace on the strength of the great benefits for which they had been responsible.

To a modern reader there are other equally interesting passages that deserve quotation, but lack of space forbids giving more than a part of the section (§§ 128-171) that contains the earliest moral allegory of some of the ritual prescriptions of Mosaic Law, such as was later richly developed by Philo.

For though in general all things are alike in their physical principles, being governed by the same power, in every case there is a deep reason why we abstain from the use of some things and enjoy the use of others. This I will summarily explain by one or two examples. For you must not get the degrading notion that it was out of respect for mice and weasels and such creatures that Moses showed such care in his legislation. Rather did he draw up all these solemn prescriptions for the sake of righteousness and to aid in attaining holiness and the perfecting of character. For all the birds we use [for food] are tame and distinguished by their cleanliness and feed on grain and pulse, such as pigeons. turtledoves, moorfowls, partridges, geese and other such birds. But the birds that are forbidden you will find to be wild and carnivorous and to dominate others by their strength and wrongfully prey on the tame birds mentioned above. . . . He therefore used them as examples, calling them "unclean," to show that those for whom the Law was ordained should practice righteousness in their souls and not dominate anyone in reliance upon their own strength nor deprive others of anything, but steer their lives by what is right, just as the tame birds mentioned above consume various kinds of pulse growing in the earth, and do not dominate their kindred species in order to destroy them.

3. *Pseudo-Phocylides*

Among the Greek moralistic poets of whose works only a few fragments have come down to us was a certain Phocylides of Miletus who lived in the sixth century B.C.E. Evidently he was a writer of considerable authority in later times, for a Jew of the Hellenistic period chose Phocylides as the pagan poet on whom to foist his own composition consisting of 230 hexametric verses in classical Greek style and with a content chiefly based on the moral prescriptions of Mosaic Law.

This crypto-Jewish work in Greek form is the more interesting for its failure to denounce pagan idolatry or to praise specific Jewish customs, as did outspoken Jewish Hellenists like Philo and the author of III Maccabees. Pseudo-Phocylides is so careful to conceal his Jewish origin that he presents only the most universalistic features of biblical morality and piety. This concealment, it is safe to say, is due to his technique of propaganda and not to expediency or timidity. Of course, there is a bare possibility that the author was not a Jew but a pagan admirer of the Greek Bible, or even a crypto-Christian. But in view of the assured Jewish character of similar works, it is far more probable that the author was Jewish. A few specimen lines (8-11, 84-85) are here translated in rough approximation of the Greek style and dactylic meter:

First honor God, and next after Him honor those who begot thee.
Deal out justice to all men, and twist not judgment to favor.
Turn not away the poor without right, and respect not men's persons.
Be not a wicked judge lest God in turn someday condemn thee.

Flee from false witness, and justice alone be what thou desirest.
Let no one take from the nest all the birds that are sheltered within it,
But set the mother bird free, and some other day thou'lt have her fledglings.

### 4. *The Wise Menander*

Most famous of the writers of the comedy of manners in the Hellenistic world was the Attic poet Menander, who flourished in the generation after Alexander the Great. His numerous plays were not only imitated and adapted by the two great Roman comedy writers Plautus and Terence but continued to influence Roman satirists of the imperial age, and like the plays of Shakespeare, became a part of the general culture of the Western world after their author had died. Echoes of Menander's informal philosophy are found even in the New Testament, for example, "evil communications corrupt good manners" in I Cor. 15:33. Moreover, wise and witty sayings were culled from the numerous works of Menander (of which, unfortunately, only fragments have survived) and included in anthologies of maxims from the Greek poets and philosophers.

It was probably the Attic Menander who was in the mind of the author or editor of a collection of gnomic sayings, probably in the iambic meter of six feet used for this purpose in Greek literature, of which a Syriac translation was found in a seventh-century manuscript of the British Museum, bearing the title *The Wise Menander Said.* Thirty years after its publication by J. Land in 1862, another scholar, Frankenberg, showed that these verses, about a hundred and fifty in number, closely resembled sayings in biblical Wisdom literature, and thus, he argued, they represent the work of a Jewish writer of the Roman period. But since the collection contains a number of genuine sayings of Menander and other pagan writers, it is probable that the Greek original of this Syriac translation was a Jewish pseudepigraph, designed to convey Jewish ideas in a form that would appeal to Greek readers, particularly because of the prestige that was attached to the name of Menander. The following few verses are given in a translation that attempts to suggest the meter probably used in the lost Greek original of the Syriac text.

Fear God, and honor too thy father and thy mother.
Mock not old age, for thou thyself wilt come to it.
If from his youth thy son emerge both meek and wise,
Teach him the scribal art and wisdom; these two things
Are good to learn and bring clear eyes and flowing tongue.
What's hateful to thee, unto friends seek not to do.

In the expression "scribal art and wisdom" the reader will immediately recognize an allusion to Dan. 1:17.

*5. The Sibylline Oracles*

Among the ancient legendary givers of oracles and prophecies the mysterious women called Sibyls enjoyed great prestige in the Hellenistic-Roman period. Most high school boys of past generations were familiar with the story, told by Virgil in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, of Aeneas's visit to the Cumean sibyl who foretold to him the future trials and triumphs of the Roman people and prepared him for his descent into the nether world. But the Cumean sibyl was only one of several whose prophecies, recorded in Greek hexameters, were widely circulated in the early days of the Roman Empire. Besides the Greco-Roman sibyls of Cumae in Italy, of Erythrae in Asia Minor, of Libya, of Delphi in Greece, there were also Oriental sibyls, Hebrew, Persian and Chaldean. Sometimes they were considered separate figures, sometimes the Persian and Chaldean sibyls were identified with the Jewish sibyl, Sabbe or Sambathe, the daughter of Berossus (Berossus actually having been a Babylonian historian of the third century B.C.E. who translated cuneiform records into Greek).

The extant manuscripts of Sibylline Oracles represent a collection made in the fifth or sixth century C.E., which contains several thousand verses, divided into fourteen or fifteen books. They are ostensibly pagan prophecies of the dire calamities about to overtake the Gentile world, but actually they are in large part Jewish and Christian compositions in pagan disguise, meant to warn their readers to repent of their sins and to recognize the truth of Jewish or Christian teaching. Some of the Jewish oracles probably date from the second century B.C.E. It is hardly necessary to state that they were not genuine predictions of things to come but, like many apocalyptic writings, were prophecies after the event.

It is not always easy to distinguish the Jewish from the Christian portions because the original Jewish prophecies were imitated or revised by Christian writers. However, there is general agreement that we have basically Jewish material in most of Books III, IV and V and in parts of later books. Many events of Jewish history in the Hellenistic-Roman period are alluded to in these supposed prophecies, but the language is often so poetically obscure and the symbolism so vague that it is not always possible for modern scholars to be certain of the exact incidents described. From the less ambiguous passages we can be fairly sure that the Jewish author or authors included a rapid survey of Jewish history from the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes to the decades following the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. Clearly Jewish is the tone of those passages in which the sibyl denounces pagan idolatry and immorality, announces the coming of a Messianic age and the punishment of the godless, and consoles the righteous with promise of Divine help.

Unfortunately there is not sufficient material to enable us to estimate how deep an impression was made upon pagan readers by these crypto-Jewish Sibylline Oracles, but it is safe to say that Virgil was influenced by them in writing his *Fourth Eclogue*, which describes the coming golden age of Roman imperialism. Occasional echoes of Messianic imagery in later Greek and Latin literature suggest that these Jewish verses in Greek form had considerable effect in forming certain types of pagan literature during the early centuries of the Roman Empire. Whether they had a more practical effect in winning pagan converts to Judaism can only be conjectured.

Of the large number of verses of undoubted Jewish origin, the following few are selected as representative; they are given in metrical translation suggesting the form of the Greek meter employed (Book III, 36-39, 46-52).

> O generation delighting in blood, crafty, evil and godless,
> Men who lie and are double-tongued and evil of nature,
> Stealing other men's wives, idolators, craftily plotting;
> Evil lurks in your breasts, like a maddening gadfly pursues you.
> But that day will come when Rome will rule over Egypt,
> Though it be still delayed, and then the almighty kingdom
> Of the eternal King will appear to mankind in glory.
> Then will the holy prince come and on earth bear the scepter
> Throughout all aeons forever, as time hurries onward.
> Then shall the wrath inexorably descend on the Latins,
> And by a pitiful fate Three will bring Rome into ruin.

### 5. EPIC AND DRAMA

Until quite recent times it was generally thought that the Jews of the Greek-speaking Diaspora were almost completely unaffected by the artistic impulses of their Greek neighbors. However, the excavations of synagogues decorated with mosaic and painted representations of human, animal and floral figures have caused us to revise our opinions concerning the lack of pictorial art among the Jews of the Hellenistic-Roman period. By contrast, philologists have long been aware that among Greek-speaking Jews there were persons of literary talent who showed skill in adapting the language and style of Greek epic and dramatic poetry to biblical themes. Unfortunately the works of all but three of such writers have been completely lost, and of the three whose poetry has escaped oblivion only scant fragments have survived in the ninth book of the *Evangelical Preparation* of Eusebius, the same writer who has preserved fragments of the Hellenistic Jewish prose writers mentioned above. For this reason it may be something of a surprise to the general reader that in the Hellenistic

age there were Jews who wrote epics and dramas in Greek about the sacred history of Israel.

1. *Philo the Elder (Philo Epicus)*

The Jewish epic poet Philo was not, of course, the philosopher Philo of Alexandria (on whom see below) but was probably the same person whom Josephus, in his *Against Apion*, refers to as Philo the Elder and couples with the Hellenistic Jewish historians Demetrius and Eupolemus. Since Josephus and Eusebius depend for their information about Philo the Elder upon Alexander Polyhistor, who flourished about 100 B.C.E., it is clear that the poet must have written as early as the second century B.C.E.

According to Eusebius, Philo wrote an epic called *On Jerusalem*, but the learned Church Father has seen fit to quote only three fragments amounting in all to twenty-four lines. It is also unfortunate that the few extant verses are written in the recondite and labored style of Alexandrian epic poets and are somewhat difficult to understand. The following is a verse-translation of a five-line fragment on Joseph, quoted by Eusebius from the fourth book (we must amend ms. "fourteenth" to "fourth"). From the position of this fragment and the statement of Clement of Alexandria that Philo wrote about the kings of Israel, we may conjecture that the epic covered twenty-four books, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

> For them a blessed abode did the great world leader establish,
> He, the Most High, of old for the children of Abram and Isaac
> And of the child-blessed Jacob. Thence came Joseph the dreamer,
> Prophet of God, who wielded the scepter over all Egypt,
> And revolved in his mind the secrets of time in the floodtide of fortune.

2. *Theodotus*

About Theodotus, the author of an epic *On the Jews*, we know as little as about his contemporary Philo Epicus. The forty-seven hexameter verses cited by Eusebius in the ninth book of his *Evangelical Preparation* from Alexander Polyhistor are concerned with the Israelites' conquest of Shechem and the revenge taken by Simeon and Levi for the seduction of Dinah. From the fact that the extant fragments narrate only this episode and that Shechem is called a "holy city" some scholars have inferred that Theodotus was a Samaritan rather than a Jew. But "holy city" is a stock epithet in Greek epic poetry, and there is no trace of anti-Jewish feeling in the poem, such as one would expect in a Samaritan work; moreover, the poem stresses the impiety of the Shechemites. We shall therefore probably be right in considering Theodotus a Jewish writer.

Theodotus writes in a simpler and more Homeric style than Philo Epicus, who, as we saw, preferred the artificial manner of contemporary

Alexandrian poets. In respect of the Hellenistic elements in this Jewish work it is interesting that Eusebius reports the author as saying that the city got its name from "Shechem son of Hermes." But in spite of Theodotus's use of the language of Greek mythology we must, I think, agree with the German editor Ludwich in regarding "Hermes" as a corruption of *Hamor* (Greek *Emor*), since Shechem is so designated in the poem itself as in the Greek version of Genesis, on which the extant fragments are based (ch. 34).

The following few lines from the passage describing Jacob's coming from Mesopotamia to Palestine (here called Syria) may suffice to give an idea of the style:

> Then Jacob made his way to the kine-bearing land of Syria,
> Leaving behind the stream of the wide, onrushing Euphrates,
> For he had come from there, leaving the bitter reproaches
> Made by his very own kin, though gladly had Laban received him
> Into his home, who was cousin to him, and sole ruler
> Over all Syria . . .

### 3. *Ezekiel the Tragic Poet*

Epic poetry was not the only field of Greek literature cultivated by the Jewish writers of Alexandria. Centuries before Christian monks and clerics produced dramas based on biblical themes, a Jewish poet named Ezekiel wrote tragedies on these subjects. Considerable fragments, amounting to over two hundred lines, from one of his dramas on the Exodus have been preserved by Eusebius in that precious ninth book of his *Evangelical Preparation*, again from the lost compilation of Alexander Polyhistor.

Ezekiel has taken the story of Moses and the Israelites' flight from Egypt from the Greek version of the Book of Exodus, and has given it dramatic form on the lines of classical Greek tragedy, especially under the influence of Euripides. There are, however, some deviations from the pattern of Attic drama, such as more frequent changes of scene and the omission of choral passages. Unity of action is obtained by making Moses the central figure in all the scenes. The meter used in the extant fragments is the iambic trimeter, regularly employed in the dialogue of Attic plays.

Modern scholars disagree on the question whether Ezekiel's *Exodus* was meant to be presented in an Alexandrian theater or merely to be read as a closet drama. The latter is more likely, not merely because of the technical problems presented by frequent changes of scene but also because it is difficult to believe that Jews would have attended a theatrical performance of a sacred legend in which God himself was one of the actors. Nor is it much more likely that there would have been a Gentile audience for such a play. But it would be foolish to speak dogmatically on this

subject in the present state of our knowledge about the everyday life of Jews in the Hellenistic Diaspora.

It is also probable that Ezekiel wrote this drama about Moses and the Exodus not merely for the instruction or encouragement of Jews who had a Greek secular education but also for Gentiles whom he might hope to impress with the power of Israel's God to save His people from persecution. For translation I have selected part of the dialogue between God and Moses concerning the miracles which God wishes Moses to perform with his staff (based on Ex. 4:2-7). The language here is simple, rapid and almost prosaic:

GOD: What is this thing in thy two hands? Speak quickly now.
MOSES: It is a staff with which to strike both beasts and men.
GOD: Cast it upon the ground and quickly move away.
For 'twill become a serpent dreadful to behold.
MOSES: See, I have thrown it down. O Lord, be gracious now.
How dreadful! What a monster! Do Thou pity me!
I shudder at the sight and tremble in every limb.
GOD: Fear naught, but stretch thy hand and take its tail,
And once more it will be a staff just as before.
Now thrust thy hand into thy bosom and draw it out.
MOSES: Thy bidding I have done. My hand is white as snow.
GOD: Now thrust it back again. 'Twill be just as before.

### 6. WISDOM LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

Like the other nations of the ancient Near East the Israelites treasured the admonitions and counsels of their wise men concerning right behavior toward God and fellow man. These sayings, though written in language more prosaic, more reflective and less emotional than that used by the prophets, were no less religious in content, if we give to the word "religion" the more inclusive meaning that it had in antiquity. Sometime during the early part of the period of the Second Commonwealth, a collection of such wise sayings was published under the title the Proverbs of Solomon, though in fact a large part of the collection dates from a period after Solomon, and a few of the thirty-one chapters are actually a translation of Egyptian Wisdom literature written long before Solomon's time.

This Book of Proverbs became the model for Palestinian writers of the Hellenistic period, like the authors of the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Ben Sira,[4a] who further developed the ancient theme that "the beginning of wisdom is the reverence of God." In their choice of subjects to moralize about and their concern to identify *Hokmah* (Wisdom)[5a] with Torah (Revealed Law), they closely followed traditional lines of moral and religious speculation.

Among the Jewish thinkers of the Greek Diaspora, however, the con-

tact with Greek philosophy and theology, however superficial it may have been in some cases, led them to give a more logical or systematic or metaphysical form to their expositions of Judaism. This is not to imply that the talmudists of Palestine were less acute in argument or less rational in ethics than the Greek philosophers or Hellenistic Jewish theologians. It is only to state the innocuous truism that the formal aspects of our Western intellectual traditions go back to the Greeks, and that it was the Greek philosophers, particularly those of the Hellenistic period, who created the terminology and methodology of our scientific thinking.

### 1. *The Wisdom of Solomon*

Of the three Hellenistic Jewish philosophical works that have survived in addition to the extensive remains of Philo, only the Wisdom of Solomon (which is also, of course, apologetic and eschatological in content) adheres to the pattern of Wisdom literature established by the Book of Proverbs. What distinguishes it most conspicuously from this and other Hebrew books of like nature, such as Ecclesiastes and Ben Sira, is its occasional use of Greek philosophical terms and forms of argument and its partial adoption of Greek notions of the pre-existence and immortality of the soul and of the Divine powers. In some passages, as in the catalogues of virtues and sins, its rhetoric reminds one of that of the Stoic diatribe, a kind of street-corner sermon.

On the other hand, it is clear from the frequent use made of biblical doctrines, imagery and phrases that the author must have been familiar with the Scriptures, probably with the Hebrew text as well as with the Greek translation. In this connection we are reminded that the book was well known to the apostle Paul whose own teaching was an even more subtle blend of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas and turns of expression. Perhaps it was Paul's admiration for the Wisdom of Solomon that caused the early Christian church to regard it as one of the most important books in the Apocrypha.

While there is an undeniable unity of tone and vocabulary throughout the nineteen chapters of the book, the subject matter is rather obviously divisible into three parts. Chapters 1-5 deal with future rewards and punishments for good and evil conduct and briefly allude to the part played by Wisdom in promoting righteousness. Chapters 6-10 form an eloquent dissertation on Wisdom which, as an effluence of God's power, has preserved the righteous throughout Israel's history. This section takes as its point of departure the famous passage in the Book of Kings in which Solomon prays for wisdom rather than riches and power, at least according to later tradition. In this part of the book Wisdom corresponds fairly closely to the Rabbinic personification of Torah as well as to the Stoic *Pronoia*, or Providence. Chapters 11-19 sketch Israel's earlier history and

in Rabbinic fashion demonstrate how Israel's enemies have been punished on the principle of "measure for measure"; for example, the various plagues that afflicted the Egyptians were appropriate to the injuries they had done the Israelites. These chapters also present a well-reasoned argument against idolatry, having especially the Egyptians in mind, and give a quasi-anthropological account of the origins of this practice, which though more tolerant is not less effective than the prophetic denunciations of idol worship.

With the technical problems of the date, composition, authorship and original language of the Wisdom of Solomon we have not space to deal at length. It must suffice to say that the weight of evidence supports those scholars who believe that most if not all the book was composed in Greek by an Alexandrian Jew who probably spoke or at least read Hebrew as well as Greek. Though several distinct subjects are treated, perhaps based on different sources, the writer has combined them in such a way as to give the work the stamp of single authorship. The date of composition or final editing cannot be fixed exactly but was probably near the beginning of the Common Era. Some scholars of an earlier period conjectured that the philosopher Philo was the author of this apocryphal book, but this conjecture is no longer taken seriously.

With many interesting and eloquent passages to serve as quotations from a book which has had so great an influence on Christian thought, it is an ungrateful task to select a very few as illustrative of its doctrine and style. It is hoped that the following three passages are sufficiently representative.

In 3:1-5 we have, in answer to the age-old query of why "the good die young," a testament of faith that the righteous do not die but pass on to eternal life. This belief is found also in Philo and Rabbinic literature but there it is perhaps less poetically expressed.

> The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
> And no torment will touch them.
> In the eyes of the thoughtless they seem to have died,
> And their departure is reckoned as an evil,
> And their going hence as a disaster.
> But they are at peace.
> For if in the sight of men they have been punished,
> Their hope is full of immortality.
> Being chastised a little, greatly will they be rewarded.
> For God has tested them and found them worthy of Him.

When, in 6:17-20, the author commends to earthly rulers the study and practice of Wisdom, he attempts to show that Wisdom alone leads to kingship by using the *sorites*, or chain argument, favored by the Stoics. Thus he combines Stoic logic with the spirit of Judaism to make the point,

central in the teachings of Plato and later Greek political thinkers, that kings should be philosophers.

> For her [Wisdom's] beginning is the most sincere desire for instruction,
> And the concern for instruction is love.
> Love is the keeping of her laws,
> And observance of the laws is assurance of incorruption.
> Incorruption brings men close to God.
> Thus does the desire for Wisdom lead men to kingship.

The last passage for which there is room here is part of a breathless catalogue, in 7:22-23, of the various beneficent aspects of versatile Wisdom. In this catalogue some commentators have found a striking similarity to a list of the attributes of wisdom or virtue made by the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes.

> For in her there is a spirit intellectual and holy,
> Only-begotten, of many parts, subtle,
> Mobile, delicate, undefiled,
> Clear, harmless, loving good, keen,
> Undeterred, beneficent, humane,
> Firm, sure, without care,
> All-powerful, all-seeing,
> Pervading all spirits
> That are intellectual, pure and subtle.

This spirit of Wisdom, the chapter continues, is a breath of God's power and a reflection of eternal light, which has passed into the holy souls of all generations and made them friends of God and prophets. Nowhere in Jewish literature except in Philo, who is more elaborate and sophisticated, does one find so appealing a fusion of Greek and Jewish teaching concerning the part played by Wisdom in human affairs.

### 2. *Aristobulus*

We have seen, in the brief discussion of the Letter of Aristeas, that that book contains some passages of a philosophical nature, but as they are merely incidental to the book's apologetic purpose, the author is hardly to be classed as a professional philosopher. Among the Alexandrian philosophers who preceded Philo, however, there is one writer of whose work extensive enough fragments have been preserved to enable us to form some notion of the more strictly philosophical literature produced by Philo's coreligionists.

This writer was Aristobulus who was, according to the Church Father Clement of Alexandria, a contemporary of Ptolemy VI Philometor who reigned 181-145 B.C.E. Some scholars place Aristobulus in the Roman period and some hold him to have been a Christian, but so far no con-

vincing evidence has been offered to refute the traditional date. More doubtful is the accuracy of Clement's statement, echoed by Eusebius, that Aristobulus belonged to the Peripatetic, or Aristotelian, school of philosophy. What is clear from the extant fragments is that he attempted to harmonize the Law of Moses with the teachings of Greek philosophy in a work which bore the title *Interpretation of the Law of Moses*, or *Interpretation of the Sacred Laws*.

This harmonization Aristobulus sought to achieve partly through an allegorical explanation of the anthropomorphic allusions to God in the Pentateuch (that is, allusions to the eyes, arms, countenance, walking, etc., of God); partly by quoting Greek verses falsely attributed to Homer, Hesiod and other real and mythical poets who supposedly supported the statements of Scripture; and partly by attempting to show that Pythagoras, Plato and other Greek thinkers drew their theological doctrines from Moses. From these passages it appears, on the plausible assumption that Christian tradition correctly placed Aristobulus in the second century B.C.E., that he was a forerunner of Philo with respect to harmonizing Greek philosophy with Judaism. Whether he was Philo's equal in learning, subtlety and literary skill it would not be fair to decide, in view of the little we have from his pen compared with the extensive Philonic literature that has come down to us. From the few fragments that we have, however, it does seem that he was inferior to Philo in all three respects.

The following selections from the excerpts found in the ninth and thirteenth books of Eusebius's *Evangelical Preparation* may give some idea of the peculiar combination of ingenious interpretation and elusive phrasing that seems to characterize Aristobulus's writing.

For often what our lawgiver Moses wishes to convey when he is using language proper to other matters, by which I mean their appearances, he expresses by physical qualities and the forms of great things[?]. Now those who are able to think clearly admire the wisdom and divine inspiration for which the prophet is celebrated. To their number belong the philosophers we have mentioned and many others, especially poets who have taken notable arguments from him, for which they are admired. But to those who do not share his power and understanding and attend only to what is literally set down, he does not seem to be interpreting anything of great import. I will begin by taking each of the passages in question and explaining it so far as I am able. And if I do not find the truth or convince you, do not attribute the lack of sense to the lawgiver, but to me who am unable to make clear exactly what was in his mind. Now the arms are something that is clearly and commonly understood by us. And when you as king send out your forces with the intention of achieving something, we say that the king has a "great arm," for the word used is referred to the force which you possess. This is the very thing alluded to in our law by Moses when he says, "God brought you out of Egypt with a mighty arm."

The second fragment explains the passage in Genesis that describes how God rested on the seventh day after creating the world.

It is consistent with this that God created the whole world and, because daily life is a difficult experience for all, gave us the seventh day as a day of rest. Thus it may physically [*i.e.*, philosophically] be called the genesis of light, since by this all things are perceived. The same metaphor may be applied to Wisdom, for all light comes from her. And some of the Peripatetic school have said that she fills the part of a lantern, for those who steadily follow her will remain unconfused throughout the whole of life. But still more clearly and beautifully did one of our ancestors, Solomon, say that she existed before heaven and earth. And this is in harmony with what has been said before. For the interpretation of the statement in the Law that God rested on this day is not, as some have understood it, that God no longer continued to create but that He made an end of ordering things so that they were ordered as they were for all time. For [Scripture] indicates that in six days He made heaven and earth and all things in them that He might reveal what the various times were and foretell the order of their precedence. For once having ordered them, He preserves them and does not alter their positions. This He has made clear to us in the Law in order that we may have the principle of the number seven before us, and through this have knowledge of things human and divine. For the whole world of things that are born and grow revolves through periods of seven. And this seventh day is called the Sabbath which translated means "rest." Both Homer and Hesiod, who used our [sacred] writings as a source, have indicated that it is holy.

At this point Aristobulus introduces a number of spurious verses from Homer, Hesiod and the mythical Linos to show that the ancient Greeks also held the seventh day to be holy.

### 3. *IV Maccabees*

It was probably sometime near the beginning of the Common Era that an Alexandrian Jew with an intimate knowledge of Greek philosophy, especially that of the Stoic Posidonius (early part of the first century B.C.E.), and a formidable Greek vocabulary composed a sort of sermon or lecture on the theme: reason can control passion. This argument is illustrated by examples taken from Jewish history, especially of the Maccabean period.

Though this book, commonly known as IV Maccabees, is included in three of the oldest and most important manuscripts of the Greek Bible, it was (mistakenly) regarded by Eusebius, Jerome and other early Church Fathers as the work of Flavius Josephus; for this reason it is not found in the Latin Bible and consequently is not counted among the apocryphal books of the English and other modern versions of the Bible. IV Maccabees seems to have been entirely unknown to the Jews until modern times but it is not impossible that it was used, perhaps at second hand by the

author of the medieval Hebrew work *Yosippon*. Christian writers, on the other hand, greatly admired the book, and the famous Erasmus made a free translation of the Latin version.

Like Aristobulus and Philo, the author of IV Maccabees is chiefly concerned to show that the great virtues of the Platonic-Stoic tradition are to be attained by observing the Law of Moses. The larger part of the book, chapters 4-18, is a glorification of the triumph of reason over passion achieved by the martyrs of the Maccabean period, Eleazar, and the mother and her seven sons, whose defiance of Antiochus Epiphanes had earlier been told in II Maccabees.

Chapter 1 is a philosophical introduction that reminds one forcefully of the treatises on reason and passion that are found in the writings of Cicero and Seneca, who, like the writer of IV Maccabees, were greatly influenced by Posidonius. The theme of the book is admirably announced in verses 13-17 of this chapter.

> We are inquiring, then, whether reason is sovereign master ["autocrat" in Greek] of the passions. But let us define what reason is and what passion is, and how many forms of passion there are, and whether reason has power over all of these. Reason, then, is thought [or "mind"] based on correct principles, which chooses above all else a life of wisdom. Wisdom, moreover, is the knowledge of things human and divine and their causes. And this is education [or "culture"] acquired from the Law, through which we religiously learn things divine, and for our profit learn things human.

As historical examples of self-control in the face of great provocation or desire the author, in chapters 2 and 3, cites the cases of Moses when angered by Dathan and Abiram, of Jacob when incensed with Simeon and Levi at their cruel treatment of the Shechemites, and of David when his soldiers risked their lives to bring him water after an all-day battle with the Philistines (here our book considerably alters the account given in II Samuel and I Chronicles). In this last instance it gives a vivid impression of David's thirst and of the bravery of the soldiers who sought to bring him water.

> But he [David], although burning with thirst, considered that the drink, being equivalent to blood, was a great danger to his soul. He therefore opposed his reason to his desire and poured the drink as a libation to God. For the temperate mind is able to conquer the constraint of passion and to quench the fires of goading desire and to wrestle victoriously with the pains of the body, however overpowering they may be, and by the excellence of reason to spurn the bid for power made by the passions. But now the opportune moment calls us to narrate the story of temperate reason.

With this introduction the narrator launches into the story of the persecution of the Jews by Seleucus IV and his brother (here called son)

Antiochus Epiphanes. In general the narrative follows the contents and order of II Maccabees, but there are many variations in detail and a more extended and philosophical treatment of the martyr episodes. In II Maccabees, for example, the aged Eleazar nobly meets death under torture with a comparatively few defiant words; in IV Maccabees, however, he makes a longer and more didactic speech. Though here the details of the torture and his suffering are realistically and horrifyingly described, the author does not hesitate to represent the aged martyr as taking time to make a philosophical defense of the Mosaic Laws. With a quotation of part of his eloquent address (5:33-38) this brief account of IV Maccabees may fittingly be concluded.

I will not belie thee, O Law, that wast my teacher, nor will I abjure thee, dear Continence, nor will I bring shame upon thee, O wisdom loving Reason, nor deny thee, honored Priesthood and knowledge of the Law. Neither shalt thou, O mouth, defile my revered old age or the years I have spent in living according to the Law. Pure shall my fathers receive me, nor do I fear thy [Antiochus's] torments even unto death. For over impious men thou mayest tyrannize, but neither by words nor by deeds shalt thou be master over my pious reason.

4. *Philo*

Of the Hellenistic Jewish writers whose works have come down to us in part or whole none is so intrinsically worthy of study or, with the possible exception of Josephus, so important in the Western tradition of learning as Philo of Alexandria. Throughout the whole period of scholarship since the Renaissance there has been a continuous and intensive study of his writings by theologians and exegetes. But it has been only during the past few decades that Philo has begun to achieve recognition as a creative or at least historically productive philosopher,[6a] and there has been an ever-increasing number of books and monographs devoted to this aspect of his work. Some indication of the attitude that prevailed half a century ago among historians of ideas is given by the fact that the great German historian of Greek philosophy, Eduard Zeller, in the fourth edition of his magisterial *Philosophie der Griechen* (1903) gives only half as much space to Philo as to Plotinus, and treats Philo as a theologian rather than as a philosopher. By the time this chapter has been published there will have appeared two substantial volumes from the pen of Professor Harry A. Wolfson of Harvard University which will seek to rehabilitate Philo as an original philosophical thinker and to give him his rightful place in the history of that discipline.

We are not concerned here, however, with the problem of whether Philo was primarily a theologian or a philosopher, since the distinction between theology and philosophy had far less, if any, meaning for the

intellectuals of Philo's time than for us. What is of greater importance in this connection is the fact that his writings have a threefold value in the study of philosophy. In the first place, they furnish us with a body of thought with which to compare the theology and ethics of Paul and of the Rabbis of Palestine and thus enable us to arrive at a more just estimate of the intellectual climate in which Christianity arose. Second, on closer scrutiny they are revealed as the source of a great part of the synthesis of Hellenism and Judeo-Christian tradition that was effected by the Greek Church Fathers (many of whom liberally quoted or paraphrased Philo's interpretations of Scripture). Third, it was Philo more than any single predecessor of Plotinus who, as Zeller admits (iii. 2.89), gave the first powerful impetus to that fusion of Greek and Oriental thought known as Neoplatonism, which in turn became the inspiration of one of the chief currents of medieval Scholasticism and even of some modern idealistic philosophies.

Apart from the philosophical aspects of Philo's works one must notice the gratifying fact that among religious historians of today there has arisen a new appreciation of the poetry and mystical insights of Philo, which are so pervasive an element in his writings that some scholars have gone so far as to argue that he was primarily a mystic who used Judaism merely as an outer form in which to clothe an esoteric personal religion. Such a view, however, is a distortion of his whole manner of thought and expression and does not correspond to what we know of his practical activity. It is far more reasonable to regard Philo as the most gifted and versatile of those pious Hellenistic Jews who sought to find the highest truths of Greek philosophy, science and religion in the laws of Moses. Like Aristobulus, Pseudo-Aristeas and others, Philo tried to show that a life lived in accordance with the Jewish tradition was not incompatible with the attainment of Greek culture but that Judaism was as full and rich a doctrine as Platonism or Stoicism or Orphism or any combination of pagan beliefs. He further tried to prove that even the rigorous discipline and ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law might lead to a devout and unworldly inner life of piety and contemplation.

The little we know of Philo's life is based on a brief paragraph in Josephus and occasional personal remarks in his own writings. He was a resident of Alexandria and must have been born about 20 B.C.E., since he speaks of himself as "an elderly man" at the time of his mission to Rome in 40 C.E. The wealth and prestige of his family are indicated by the facts that his brother Alexander was an important tax official of the Roman government and that one of his nephews, a son of Alexander, was married to a daughter of King Agrippa I, while another nephew, named Tiberius Julius Alexander, was at one time Roman procurator of Judea and later a Roman prefect of Egypt and one of the leading Roman generals who

took part in the siege of Jerusalem. Whether Philo quarreled with his brother's son because of his completely anti-Jewish attitude we do not know. Neither do we know whether Philo was throughout his life as active a political figure in the Alexandrian Jewish community as was his apostate nephew in the Roman government. We do know, however, that Philo was head of the Jewish legation sent from Alexandria to Rome in 40 C.E. to protest to the mad Emperor Caligula against the pogrom instigated by Egyptian and Greek anti-Semites and abetted by Roman officials. Incidentally, there is no trustworthy evidence to support the Christian story that while in Rome Philo met the Apostle Peter.

From incidental statements in his writings we learn that, though Philo scrupulously observed Jewish ritual, he attended the Greek theater, athletic contests and chariot races. Moreover, in addition to his firsthand knowledge of the more external aspects of Greek culture, Philo had a wide and deep knowledge, which would have been remarkable even in a Gentile scholar, of Greek poetry and philosophy.

Though we no longer possess the whole of Philo's work, to judge from the catalogue of his writings given by Eusebius we do have a large part of it, amounting to some thirty complete treatises and a large number of fragments. His writings have been variously classified by modern scholars on the bases of chronology, content and motivation (whether addressed primarily to Jews or to Gentiles). The following classification closely follows that made by Leopold Cohn, one of the greatest Philonic scholars of modern times.

I. Writings of Purely Philosophical Content.

These include four treatises: *On the Eternity of the World; That Every Good Man is Free; On Providence* (preserved partly in Greek, wholly in Armenian); *Alexander*, or *That Animals Have Reason* (preserved only in Armenian).

II. Interpretation of the Pentateuch (chiefly Genesis and Exodus).

This body of work is subdivided into three classes.

A. The Allegorical Commentary on Genesis. This is a running commentary on Gen. 2-41, consisting of sixteen treatises, concerned chiefly with the first half of the biblical book.

B. Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus. This is a briefer running commentary, preserved only fragmentarily in Greek and much more fully in Armenian. The Armenian version has preserved four of the original six books on Genesis and two of the original five on Exodus.

C. A Historical-Exegetical Commentary on the Mosaic Law. This is not a running commentary, except on the biblical narrative of the Creation, but a systematic treatment of the ethics of the Pentateuch, partly arranged under types of morality symbolized by the Patriarchs and Moses. This systematic work contains the following treatises: *On the Creation of the*

*World; On Abraham; On Joseph* or *The Statesman; On the Special Laws* (of the Decalogue) in four books with various subtitles.

III. Historical-Apologetic Writings. These include: *On the Life of Moses* in three (originally two) books; *Hypothetica* (preserved only in fragments); *Apology for the Jews* (preserved only in fragments); *On the Contemplative Life* (of the Therapeuts); *Against Flaccus* (the anti-Jewish governor of Egypt); *The Legation to Gaius*. The last two treatises once formed part of a larger work in five books dealing with the Divine punishments visited upon the persecutors of the Jews.

It would be foolish to try to give in the limited space at our disposal even an outline of Philo's metaphysical and ethical and theological doctrines, to say nothing of his views on education and politics. It must suffice to state summarily that Philo, like some of his Alexandrian Jewish predecessors, used whatever Greek philosophical theories were convenient for adaptation to his allegorical interpretation of the Bible, of which the Greek text was regarded by him as no less inspired than the Hebrew original. Thus, to give a few obvious examples, he makes consistent use of the Platonic doctrine that the immaterial ideas are superior to sense-perceived matter, that the world was created as a perfect thing by a benevolent God, and that the ills of human life arise from the victory of sense and passion over reason. From Plato and the Stoics he borrowed the formulation of the idea (though not the idea itself) that reason must control the senses and that through reason, which is a spark of the Divine in man, we can come closer to God. Philo was the first philosopher known to us who achieved any degree of success in harmonizing the idea of an eternal immaterial God with the God of Jewish history, and in showing how a transcendent God came into contact with a material world subject to the changes of time and with the human personality. Philo solves these problems, to his satisfaction and that of many of his Neoplatonic and Christian readers, by assuming that there were intermediaries between God and the world, these being hypostatized physical and moral powers emanating from God Himself. The first intermediary power was the *Logos*, which Philo poetically describes as the eldest son of God (but not in the sense that the Gospel of John has in making the pre-existent Word of God identical with Jesus). The *Logos* in turn produced from itself other powers of God, the royal power and the beneficent power, which remind us of the two *Middot* or attributes of God in Rabbinic theology, the attribute of mercy and the attribute of justice. Like the Rabbis, Philo connects one power with the name "Lord" and the other with the name "God," but differs from them in connecting mercy with "God" and royalty with "Lord" instead of the reverse. The history of the idea of a *Logos*, or immaterial principle, pervading the material world is too complex to be more than mentioned here. But it may be of interest to note that the

*Logos* plays somewhat the same role in Philo's theology that Torah does in Rabbinic theology.

What is probably of more interest to a casual reader is the ingenuity of Philo's allegorical interpretation of Scripture and his amazingly consistent use of biblical symbols to describe the unresting pilgrimage of the soul to the eternal truth of a God beyond space and time. His great allegory of the patriarchal history and the Mosaic Law is a kind of *Divine Comedy*. Though it is written in prose and without formal literary unity, it has the architectonic quality of Dante's great poetic synthesis of medieval theology and history.

Not only do the more obvious "properties," to borrow a theatrical term, such as the Patriarchs and the sacred cult objects serve Philo as symbols of moral and religious ideas, but even the most neutral and common things mentioned in the Pentateuch, such as rivers, mountains, plants and animals, are all made to play a meaningful part in this dramatic composition. His ability to create a consistent theological pattern out of bits of natural lore, folklore, Pythagorean number-mysticism and a vast assortment of materials constantly astonishes and sometimes wearies the faithful reader of his works.

Just as there is something Dantesque in the sustained dramatic intention of his allegory, so there is something Proustian in the psychological acuteness of his observation of human actions and in the overrich complexity of his discourses on morality and history. Some fifty years ago Claude Montefiore published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* a delightful anthology of choice passages from Philo that deserves reprinting in more convenient form. The reader who has access to the files of that periodical is urged to read the whole of Montefiore's *Florilegium Philonis*. The following few passages, chosen independently by the present writer, are given not with a view to making a miniature anthology of the most appealing passages in Philo but merely to illustrate some of his characteristics.

The first selection is from Philo's later and briefer commentary on Genesis and Exodus, called *Questions and Answers* (preserved only in Armenian except for a few score incomplete paragraphs). This particular passage, from Book II:42, takes the biblical verse, Genesis 8:11, part of the story of the flood, and draws from it, as a magician might from a plain hat, a variety of colorful interpretations. The verse reads, "And the dove returned again to him at eventide; holding an olive-leaf, a dry branch" ("dry branch" is Philo's interpretation of the "plucked branch" of Scripture). Let us see how Philo skilfully transforms each of these simple words into complex symbols.

All these are chosen symbols and tests: The "returning again," the "at evening," the "bearing an olive-leaf," the "dry branch," the "oil" and the "in its mouth." But the several symbols must be studied in detail. Now the return

is distinguished from the earlier flight. For the latter brought the report of a nature altogether corrupt and rebellious and one destroyed by the flood, that is, by great ignorance and lack of education. But the other repents of its beginning. And to find repentence is not easy but a very difficult and laborious task. For these reasons it comes at evening, having passed the whole day from early morning until evening in inspection, in word by passing through various places, but in actuality by looking over and inspecting the parts of its nature and in seeing these clearly from beginning to end. And the third symbol is "bearing a leaf." The leaf is a small part of a plant. However, it does not come into being without the plant. And similar to this it is to begin to repent. For the beginning of improvement gives a slight indication, as if it were a leaf, that it is to be guarded and can also be shaken off. But there is great hope that it will attain correction of its ways. The fourth symbol is that the leaf was of no other tree than the olive. And oil is the material of light. For evil, as I have said, is profound darkness, but virtue is a most radiant splendor. And repentance is the beginning of light. But do not think that the beginning of repentance is already in blossoming and growing things, but only while they are still dry and arid do they have a seminal principle. Wherefore the fifth symbol is that when it [the dove] came, it bore a "dry branch." And the sixth symbol is that the dry branch was "in its mouth," since six is the first perfect number. For virtue bears in its mouth, that is, in its speech, the seeds of wisdom and justice and altogether goodness of soul. And not only does it bear these gifts but it also gives a share in them to outsiders, offering water to their souls, and watering with repentance their desire for sin.

An aspect of Philo's thought which has no parallel in extant Hellenistic Jewish literature is his frequent use of the terms and ideas used in the pagan mystery-cults which professed to enable the initiate to be reborn and by divesting himself of earthly encumbrances to come into ecstatic union with a savior-god such as Dionysius or Osiris or Mithra. Philo's conception of mystical union with the Divine was less physical and emotionally primitive than that found in even the most spiritualized pagan mysteries, partly because Philo's God was less personal and more transcendent than Greek-Oriental gods, and partly because his healthy Jewish instinct or training kept him from too exalted or irrational a flight into unreality. The dangers of substituting pure symbolism for a life of active and traditional piety enriched by symbolism are pointed out in one of the more frequently quoted passages from Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham* (89 ff.), which reads in part:

There are some who take the literal laws as symbols of intellectual matters, and while they are overscrupulous about the latter, they carelessly neglect the former. Such men I for my part would blame for their offhandedness. They ought to give attention to both things . . . We should have to neglect the holy service of the temple and a thousand other things if we gave thought only to the things revealed in their deeper sense. Rather should we look on these [outward] things as resembling the body, and the other [inner] things

as resembling the soul. Now just as we have to take thought for the body as the dwelling-place of the soul, so we have to pay attention to the letter of the laws, for if we keep them we shall have a clearer notion of the things which they symbolize, and at the same time we shall escape the blame and reproach of the multitude.

What seems to a modern reader most salutary in his writing is his adherence to a doctrine that while the senses are not to be completely suppressed they are to be constantly controlled by reason and that through this same reason the soul can be possessed by a mystical rapture. It is no mere use of picturesque quotation but sober truth to say that long before Spinoza the unique beauty of "the intellectual love of God" was celebrated by Philo. The following passage, from the *Sacred Allegories* (i. 39 ff.), illustrates Philo's belief that the soul achieves mystical rapture not by intoxication or other disturbances of normal behavior, as in the pagan mysteries, but by submerging the senses in a flood of reason, a flood that wells up from the hidden sources of the Mosaic Law rightly understood and practiced. The passage is a commentary on Gen. 2:7, "And God formed man by taking clay from the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life; and the man became a living soul."

Philo comments as follows:

There are two kinds of men, one the heavenly man, the other earthly . . . We must account the man made of earth to be mind in the process of being mixed with body but not already mixed. This earthly mind is in reality corruptible except that God breathes into it a power of true life . . . God projects the power that comes from Him through the mediating breath [or wind] till it reaches the subject. And for what other purpose is this than that we may obtain a conception of Him, for how could the soul have conceived of God if He had not breathed into it and seized it through His power? . . . For the mind imparts to the irrational part of the soul a share of that which it has received from God, so that the mind is besouled by God while the irrational part is besouled by the mind. For the mind is, as it were, the God of the irrational part, just as Scripture does not hesitate to speak of Moses as "a God to Pharaoh."

Of Philo's poetic metaphysics we have a good example in the treatise *On Creation* (20 ff.), where he compares the creation of the world through the instrumentality of the *Logos* with the planning of a city by an architect using charts which set down the ideal city he has in mind and from which he proceeds to build the actual city. The same idea of the divine architect is found in Plato's *Timaeus* and in the Rabbinic work *Bereshit Rabbah*, but Philo's metaphor is more sustained and more vivid. A part of the passage in Philo reads as follows:

Similarly one must think about God, that when He was minded to found the great city [*i.e.*, the world], He first conceived of the types of its parts, and

from these He wrought an intelligible [*i.e.*, ideal] world, which He used as a model for the sensible [*i.e.*, visible] world. And just as the city formed within [the mind of] the architect has no place outside him but has been engraved in his soul as by a seal, so also the world of ideas would have had no other place than the Divine *Logos* which made this ordered world.

It is a great pity that lack of space makes it impossible to comment on many other aspects of Philo's work and to illustrate these by quotations. Perhaps this brief study can best be concluded with a quotation from the treatise *On the Change of Names* (39 ff.), which shows that this mystical thinker was not concerned solely with his own salvation but was also constantly mindful of his fellow man.

These men are possessed by a divine madness and live a wild and solitary life. But there are others who are familiars of a gentle and tame wisdom. They practice piety eminently and do not despise human things. This is attested by the oracle in which it is said to Abraham out of the mouth of God (Gen. 17:1), "Be well-pleasing before Me." "This means 'not to Me only but to My works also [*i.e.*, other human beings], while I as judge watch and oversee thee'" . . . And so Moses in his exhortations gives this charge (Deut. 12:28), "Thou shalt do what is well-pleasing before the Lord thy God," which means that you should do such things as shall be worthy to appear before God and which he will see and approve; such deeds are likely to be well-pleasing to our fellows as well.

## NOTES

[1a Cf. above Elias J. Bickerman, "The Historical Foundations of Post-biblical Judaism," pp. 97-101.]

[2a Cf. above Judah Goldin, "The Talmudic Period," p. 143.]

[3a Cf. *ibid.* pp. 116-117.]

[4a Cf. Bickerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96, 97-99.]

[5a Cf. above Robert Gordis, "The Bible as a Cultural Monument," pp. 482-487.]

[6a Cf. above Alexander Altmann, "Judaism and World Philosophy," pp. 625 ff.]

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

### A

The English reader will find the books here discussed most conveniently edited and translated in the following works:

The apocryphal and pseudepigraphic books are well translated and provided with instructive introductions and notes by various scholars in R. H.

Charles (ed.), *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament.* 2 vols. Oxford, 1913.

The best English translation of Josephus is that in the Loeb Classical Library, London, of which seven volumes have appeared to the present time: Vols. 1-4 were translated by the late Henry St. John Thackeray. Vols. 5-7 by Ralph Marcus.

The best English translation of Philo is also that in the Loeb Classical Library, of which nine volumes have appeared: Vols. 1-5 were translated by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Vols. 6-9 by F. H. Colson.

The fragments of the Hellenistic Jewish writers will be found in the work of Wallace N. Stearns, *Fragments from Graeco-Jewish Writers.* Chicago, 1908.

B

The following books will be of interest to those wishing to have more detailed discussions of some of the writers here treated.

NORMAN BENTWICH, *Philo Judaeus of Alexandria.* Philadelphia, 1910. Though now antiquated in some respects, this book is still useful because of its abundance of information and its excellent judgment. Moreover, it is written in attractive style.

ERWIN R. GOODENOUGH, *Introduction to Philo Judaeus.* New Haven, 1940. The author, a well-known Philonist of Yale University, always writes in a stimulating and illuminating way though not all of his views are to be accepted.

CLAUDE G. MONTEFIORE, "Florilegium Philonis," in *Jewish Quarterly Review,* VII, 481-545. London, 1894-1895. The excellence of this anthology has already been mentioned.

ROBERT H. PFEIFFER, *Introduction to the Old Testament.* New York, 1941. A comprehensive and authoritative, though somewhat technical, study of Old Testament literature with valuable chapters on versions of the Bible and excellent bibliographies, including apocryphal literature.

HARRY A. WOLFSON, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.* 2 vols. Cambridge, 1947.

Since this bibliography was prepared in 1946, Professor Harry A. Wolfson's monumental work on Philo has appeared. It should therefore be added to this original list.